DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 176 324 CS 205 184

AUTHOR Boyd, Zohara; Buchanan, Harriette Cuttino
TITLE English as a Second Language Techniques in Developmental Writing.
PUB DATE Mar 79
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College English Association (Savannah, Georgia, March 22-24, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); *Developmental Programs; *English (Second Language); English Instruction; Higher Education; *Remedial Instruction; Teaching Methods; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Some of the attitudes, expectations, and techniques of the English as a second language (ESL) teacher and the ESL student may be profitably applied in the developmental composition classroom. Although developmental students are native English speakers, many of them react to formal, written English as if it were a foreign language. Fostering ESL attitudes in students means helping them to recognize that their errors stem from lack of knowledge not lack of intelligence and encouraging them to admit their resentment at being placed in a developmental section. ESL attitudes that developmental teachers might adopt include lowering expectations of students' initial writing performance, being more patient with mistakes, and recognizing that students often lapse into using "interlanguage" (dialect that is midway between old grammatical patterns and new ones being acquired). ESL techniques can also prove useful in teaching certain points of grammar through drill, in helping students structure and develop their writing by providing transitions from drills to composition, and in correcting their papers by marking their errors with generic rather than specific terms. (AEA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Zohara Boyd, Harriette Cuttino Buchanan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Zohara Boyd

Harriette Cuttino Buchanan

ED176324

English as a Second Language Techniques in Developmental Writing

Teachers of developmental composition may find that many of their students, although they are native English speakers, react to formal, written English as if it were a foreign language. Like foreign students, who try to transfer the grammar and pronunciation of their native language to the target language, developmental students write in a sub-standard manner because they try to transfer the rules and sounds of informal, spoken English into formal, written English. Therefore, some of the attitudes, expectations, and techniques of the English as a Second Language, or ESL, teacher and the ESL student may also be profitably applied in developmental composition.

There are several attitudes in the ESL classroom that could produce positive results in the developmental classroom. Teachers of ESL, realizing that their students have had limited experience with English, tend to be more patient and to have lower expectations than developmental teachers. At the same time, ESL students recognize that their errors stem from lack of knowledge, not lack of intelligence; therefore, unlike many developmental students, they are neither resentful nor embarrassed when required to do remedial work. It is easy, of course, to suggest that adopting these ESL attitudes will change the atmosphere of the developmental classroom; it is much more difficult to try to implement such a system. Beneath euphemistic words like "developmental" and "basic" lie the harsh facts that such students <u>are</u> deficient in writing skills, are not taking the class of their own volition, tend to have a negative self-image, and often resent being placed in these classes. In order to make progress,

CS205184

both the developmental teacher and student must honestly face these realities.

Starting the course with an honest discussion of the situation, in which the student is allowed to admit his resentment, may help the student begin to correct his negative self-image and provide a basis for the teacher to begin trying to correct the deficiencies in his background. Developmental students who talk about their high school experiences with English often say that they were not required to do much writing, that what little writing they did was graded for content only, and that grammar and paragraph structure were not taught. By sharing such experiences, students may come to realize that their placement in a developmental class is, indeed, the result of their lack of experience with the written language and is not a reflection on their intelligence. This kind of discussion also allows the student to save face by placing the blame for his deficiencies, not on himself, but on the system from which he has come. The fact that some of the students' excuses may be misperceptions or inaccurate reportings is irrelevant for the developmental teacher's purpose; what matters is that the student is given the benefit of the doubt and allowed to begin the course with a clean slate.

There is one danger to this blame-placing technique, however. If the students find themselves failing in the remedial course, they may blame the remedial teacher just as they blamed their high school teachers. The ESL teacher frequently encounters this face-saving technique in intermediate ESL classes when underprepared students feel that they deserved advanced, rather than intermediate, placement; therefore, part of the ESL teacher's training is in dealing with student blame-placing. Developmental teachers should likewise

be prepared for a backlash in allowing the students to place blame for their deficiencies. However, if the developmental teacher is prepared and does not become demoralized by this, the positive value that this technique may have in building the student's self-esteem is well worth any backlash. There is also some positive value in the teacher's adoption of blame-placing. The ESL teacher, who often deals with students who have had British teachers in their native country, uses the blame-placing technique by accounting for some difficulties by saying, "In American English, we . . . ." Just so, the developmental teacher can justify some of the more inexplicable rules of grammar or diction by saying, "In standard, written English, we . . . ."

While fostering ESL attitudes in the students may be the ideal, obviously it is easier for the teacher to alter his own attitudes and responses to developmental students. The developmental teacher who recognizes that his students are in a foreign situation when they write will have lower expectations about their initial performance and more patience with their mistakes. One of the things most irritating to a developmental teacher is the recurrence of errors the student seemed to have overcome. The ESL teacher, however, recognizes that students who relapse into old mistakes are writing in "interlanguage," a dialect that is midway between the native language and the target language. Students who write in interlanguage fluctuate between their old grammatical patterns and the new ones they are just acquiring. In these cases, the teacher should look for the number of times such lapses occur versus the number of times the correct pattern is used. Rather than seeing these mistakes as failures, the teacher should recognize them as a normal part of language learning. Another ESL attitude the developmental teacher might adopt is tolerance of

errors that indicate a rule has been overgeneralized. The ESL teacher whose student uses "runned" for "ran" considers the mistake a good error, since it shows that the student has grasped the rule and now only needs to learn the exception. Tolerating such an error does not mean ignoring it, but recognizing it as a sign that learning is taking place.

Just as ESL attitudes may bolster the student's self-image and may give the teacher a new perspective on some student errors, so ESL techniques may also prove useful in teaching certain points of grammar, in helping students structure and develop their compositions, and in correcting their papers. The ESL technique of frequent review and constant return to old points before moving ahead to new ones is very useful in correcting errors such as the ones just described. By using frequent review and repetition, the teacher can keep return to old errors, or interlanguage patterns, to a minimum. Like ESL students, developmental students often have trouble with inflectional endings. Especially troublesome are the -s endings in nouns and verbs, possessive -'s and -s' endings, -ed endings of verbs, and idioms. ESL pattern drills may eliminate these problems much faster than the learning of grammatical rules. In pattern drills, the teacher simply presents the model--"one girl, two girls," for example--and the students repeat the pattern for a long list of other words--"one dog, two dogs; one table, two tables," etc. Rules and exceptions are introduced only after rote repetition of the pattern has fixed the correct form in the students' minds. Pattern drills, admittedly, are boring. They do not challenge the intellect, stimulate the imagination, or encourage the student to find his authentic voice. They do, however, turn the correct grammatical form into an automatic response that the student can produce without interrupting the flow of his writing to grope for memorized rules.

In order to provide the transition from drills to compositions, it is useful to begin the developmental student's work with controlled composition. In ESL the non-native English speaker is not expected to be able to write English compositions without considerable initial assistance from the instructor; just so, the developmental student has not had the necessary training in composition and needs to begin writing in a controlled situation. Perhaps the easiest way to begin is to make the paragraph work an extension of the drills with which the student has become familiar. As part of the new drills, the student is presented not with a phrase or a sentence to work on, but with a paragraph that the instructor has composed or has taken from a book. Then the student is asked to transpose various elements of the paragraph. By going through a paragraph and consistently changing all of the singulars to plurals, or plurals to singulars, he gains experience in working on inflectional endings and subject-verb agreement in context. Exercises in changing all of the verb tenses from present to past, present to future, or past to past perfect not only give the student practice with verb forms, but also make him aware of the need to have the verb tenses in a composition consistent with each other.

From this type of controlled composition, the instructor can move to a more difficult composing process. In many standard ESL texts, the student first reads a short composition or story. Then, he answers a series of leading questions about that reading. Finally, he weaves the answers to these questions together to form a paragraph essay about the material that he has read. There are several advantages to this system of composition for developmental students. First, the writing of the sentence answers to the questions provides application for the material learned in the pattern drills. The individual sentences can

be worked on for correctness of inflectional endings, subject-verb agreement, and proper use of idioms. Then, in the process of tying the sentences together into a paragraph, the student can begin work on transitions and problems of coherence. After all this preliminary work, the student can produce a reasonably sound paragraph and can have the satisfaction of a job well done, an intellectual gratification that has been absent in his education and may in part be responsible for his learning problems.

Another aspect of providing positive reinforcements for the students in the learning process involves methods of error correction. The following remarks were in part suggested by Dr. Carlos Yorio in his address, "Language Errors: What They Mean and How to Use Them in the Classroom," presented at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Association--TESOL, Charlotte, North Carolina, September 9, 1978. Dr. Yorio stressed making error correction a positive rather than a negative process. First, as most of us already realize, it is frequently useful to correct only one type of error per paper. This makes the marked paper less intimidating for the student who frequently becomes so discouraged by a mass of red markings that he gives up before he has started. The error to be corrected should tie in with the material in the pattern drills so that one reinforces the other. In this way, the student sees the connection between the drills and the writing process and receives a reward for his learning. Another technique that Dr. Yorio suggested, which would be useful not only in developmental classes but also in regular composition classes, is the marking of errors with generic rather than specific terms. Errors marked simply as errors of "grammar" or "meaning" require that the student study his mistakes. In order to correct the mistakes, he must review

his knowledge and think about its application rather than mechanically correcting a spelling, verb form, or punctuation error. In this way, the revision process becomes the learning experience that it is supposed to be.

We all know that achieving success with developmental students is not as simple as these comments may suggest. However, for the teacher who is struggling to find some way of breaking down the seemingly unbreachable barriers erected in many developmental classrooms, these suggestions may be useful. Perhaps the primary value of approaching developmental English with an ESL attitude is in the dual emphases of building the student's self-esteem by showing him that his task is the development of a foreign skill and of making that skill development possible by leading him through the drills and composition exercises at a pace that he can follow. Placing a student in a developmental class removes him from the learning mainstream. He often will be resentful and unhappy until he can re-enter that mainstream. If he sees himself as someone acquiring a foreign skill and sees how it will be possible for him to use the ESL type of system to master that skill within a definite time period, he may more willingly exert the effort that is necessary for his success. In this way, the use of ESL techniques in the developmental classroom would be rewarding for both the teacher and the student.